

Congresswoman McCollum, my name is Josh Downham and I am representing ServeMinnesota, the state's Commission on National and Community Service. Thank you for the chance to discuss our state's community service efforts and how we may collectively grow and improve our programs.

I want to share two key messages with you today.

The first message is Minnesota is making the most of federal community service funds. Minnesota has been very successful competing for federal community service dollars. Despite having the country's 22nd largest population, Minnesota ranks 4th nationally in total community service dollars leveraged. Only California, New York and Washington leverage more federal funding. This has allowed us to place more than 1000 AmeriCorps members in programs building houses, improving childhood literacy, getting under privileged students into college, helping unemployed Minnesotans find full time employment and several other critical programs. I believe our success is rooted in two factors:

1. Local programs have been willing to integrate quantifiable outcome measures into their work. A program based here in St. Paul is Admission Possible. Their success competing for federal funding and garnering private support may be directly linked to their willingness to collect and publish their bottom line - how many underprivileged high school students are they able to get into college. I am happy to say they get 98% of their students into college and their students stay in college at a higher rate than even more affluent students. It is no wonder that President Obama recently singled out Admission Possible as a program that should be replicated across the country.
2. The second reason Minnesota has been successful competing nationally is because we are willing to innovate. The first big step Minnesota took was to pull our state's commission out of the state bureaucracy and create a 501c3 that has developed strong private and philanthropic support. This private support is most evident here in St. Paul. The Greater Twin Cities United Way and the Target Foundation are partnering with the state's largest AmeriCorps program, the [Minnesota Reading Corps](#), to put reading intervention tutors in 27 high poverty elementary and pre-school classrooms. Last year, students in Minnesota who completed the Reading Corps program passed the state's third grade reading test at a 74% rate which is just behind the state average. These students began well below grade level in reading and with the help of AmeriCorps members are now keeping up in their mainstream classes. This is not only a benefit to the individual students but helps hold down special education costs for schools, the state and federal government.

Let me give you a few facts to explain the depth and breadth of the Reading Corps:

- a. In just February, 321 Reading Corps members in 220 K-3 schools across the state tutored 4,345 students for a total of 15,972 contact hours. What is amazing about this effort, each reading intervention strategy is individualized to each child's need. Trained AmeriCorps members, with the support of literacy coaches, adjust intervention strategies based on weekly student assessments. This research-based model of reading intervention was developed here at the University of Minnesota and is making a difference for

more than 12,000 students this year alone.

Minnesota is putting federal community service dollars to good work. I invite you to visit any of the eight AmeriCorps programs actively working here in the 4th Congressional District.

The second key message I want to convey is a concern we have for the increased match requirement the federal law places on local programs. As foundations are pulling back their giving and as private fundraising has become increasingly difficult in these tough economic times, the federal law requires programs that have been active for more than three years to provide additional match dollars to leverage the same amount of federal funding. By year ten, local programs must provide a 50% match. We believe there should be a local match but the escalating match requirement is having a real impact on how many Minnesotans may be served by these programs.

Several programs right here in St. Paul have forgone or scaled back their programs because they cannot raise the necessary match dollars. Habitat for Humanity, Multi-Cultural Communities in Action and the Community Technology Empowerment Project all have scaled back their programs because of the difficulty of raising matching dollars. This obviously impacts the number of Minnesotans who can take advantage of these beneficial local programs.

Representative McCollum, let me leave you with a story from one of our Minnesota Reading Corps members. She works with a third grader who at age 9, was disrupting class, being sent to the principal's office, being sent home and nearly suspended from school. However, during their one-on-one reading intervention sessions, this young girl was very attentive and polite. One day, she came to her session with a pink card she had made. On the cover was a picture of her holding hands with her Reading Corps tutor and on it she had written "Dear reading teacher, 'You are the best teacher in the world.'" This young girl recently graduated from the Reading Corps program and is now back full time in her classroom. She will be taking the 3rd grade MCA reading test this spring with the skills provided by her Reading Corps tutor.

This program didn't just get this child ready to pass a test. It restored her confidence. It showed her that adults do care about her. And something we didn't fully appreciate when we began this program. That Reading Corps member who received the pink card, she's going to give serious thought to becoming a full time teacher.

Thank you.